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Green wave overtaking more Maryland companies

Marriott, UPS among those setting, and meeting, environmental goals

by Kevin James Shay, Staff Writer

The green revolution is extending well beyond niche businesses to affect many of the state's largest companies.

Marriott International has already surpassed a 2017 goal for reducing by 25 percent its hotels' water consumption levels of 2007. UPS earned the top score in the consumer shipping category in a recent rating of environmental policies by Climate Counts, a nonprofit supported by organic foods company Stonyfield Farm.

Executives with Marriott and UPS, among the largest private employers in Maryland with 9,200 and 6,800 workers, respectively, detailed their companies' environmental accomplishments Wednesday during the Maryland Chamber of Commerce's annual Business Policy Conference in Cambridge.

Marriott, which also earned the top score from Climate Counts in the hotel sector, set the 25 percent reduction goal for water and energy in 2007. In energy reduction, the Bethesda company is getting close, with a 20 percent cut last year, while water was ahead at 29 percent, said Mari L. Snyder, vice president of social responsibility and community engagement.

"We might have to revisit those goals soon," she said.

UPS tracks its fuel consumption through software to identify ways to save and won't fly a package if it can get to its destination on time by rail or truck, said Jim Bruce, vice president of public affairs.

"We know if a driver is idling," he said.

The company also has some 1,000 compressed natural gas vehicles and almost 400 hybrid electric ones.

Marriott uses recycled plastic for many key cards and certain pillows are spun from recycled water bottles, Snyder said. The company also works on global efforts, such as campaigns to preserve rainforests in South America and preserve water in China.

While it's good that many companies have embraced the green wave, social responsibility is the next front, said Ida Cheinman, principal and creative director for Substance 151. The Baltimore strategic brand communications firm was one of the first to file this year for the state's Benefit LLC status, which provides legal protection for companies' social and environmental policies.

Not only do many consumers prefer to buy from companies that are good corporate citizens, but younger people also seek to work for such businesses, Cheinman said.

"It's an especially important part of doing business with the public sector," she said.

The two-day conference, which ended Thursday, also featured panel discussions on transportation funding, health benefits, the upcoming General Assembly session and immigration law.

Political leaders discussed upcoming potential legislation, including a possible increase in the gasoline tax.

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